

A young man with dark hair, wearing a grey sweater, is focused on looking through a black and white microscope. The microscope is on a wooden desk. In the background, a human skeleton is visible on the left, and a white wall with a red fire alarm pull station is on the right. The scene is lit with soft, natural light.

**FINDINGS FROM THE ASSESSMENT
OF THE SOCIOECONOMIC IMPACT OF
COVID-19
ON IRAQ'S VULNERABLE POPULATIONS**

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ACRONYMS

GPS	Global positioning system
IDP	Internally displaced person
IOM	International Organization for Migration
IQD	Iraqi dinar
NGO	Non-governmental organization
PPE	Personal protective equipment
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
UN	United Nations
UNDP	United Nations Development Program
UN-Habitat	United Nations Human Settlement Programme
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
WASH	Water, sanitation and hygiene

1. FOREWORD

This report is the sixth in a series of policy papers examining the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on Iraq. The first paper looked at its effects on fragility, while the second examined the macroeconomic consequences. The third investigated the effects on social cohesion, and the fourth assessed social protection mechanisms and their ability to address the repercussions of the pandemic. The fifth paper considered how the pandemic influences environmental sustainability.

The aim of these policy documents is to offer a comprehensive overview of how the pandemic is affecting the social and economic context of Iraq. This responds to the recent call from the United Nations Secretary-General for ideas on surviving and recovering from the pandemic so that families and businesses can stay afloat, and the foundation for an inclusive recovery can be laid to ensure attainment of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

This current paper presents findings from an assessment of the socioeconomic impacts of COVID-19 on households in Iraq. It is intended to inform the responses of the Government of Iraq, the United Nations system and donor partners. As the COVID-19 pandemic is a rapidly evolving global phenomenon, socioeconomic circumstances for both Iraq and the wider world are likely to change rapidly.

UNDP is grateful to the United Nations Human Settlement Programme (UN-Habitat) and the International Organization for Migration (IOM) for their collaboration on this paper. UNDP would also like to thank Barbara-Anne Krijgsman as the lead coordinator for the series of policy papers, and IMPACT Initiatives as the author of this paper. Great appreciation also goes to the UNDP Iraq Country Office team for their support in producing this document.

2. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The COVID-19 pandemic arrived in Iraq in February 2020 following years of active conflict, when the country was already facing political turmoil and an economic crisis.¹ Trade and movement restrictions, which were put in place to curb the spread of the virus, further impacted nearly all aspects of life. As of June 2020, one quarter of Iraqis who had been employed before lockdown measures were implemented had been permanently laid off, and an additional 4.5 million were estimated to have been pushed below the poverty line as a result of the pandemic.² Income levels for most Iraqi households have decreased, and as a result, so has access to food and the ability of households to meet their basic needs without resorting to coping mechanisms.³ To mitigate these impacts, both the Government of Iraq and the humanitarian community have prioritized life-saving interventions to support vulnerable populations. Ongoing government-imposed restrictions and mitigation measures, considering continuing cases, suggest that the impacts of the pandemic will likely persist across Iraq.⁴

This assessment aimed to evaluate the impact of the COVID-19 crisis on socioeconomic status and livelihoods at the household level, with a focus on vulnerable groups, such as women, youth, children, persons with disabilities and displaced communities.⁵ Data collection between 13 December 2020 and 1 March 2021 took place across all 18 governorates. A mixed-methods approach consisted of quantitative and qualitative data collection, including a literature review, household survey, key informant interviews, semi-structured individual interviews and area-based interviews. Data were formally stratified by governorate, with additional indicative aggregations presented as relevant.

Key findings

- **Households reported a decrease in their average monthly employment income over the course of the pandemic.** At the time of

data collection, the average reported monthly employment income for households had fallen by 16 percent, with a higher reported decline among households in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq versus Federal Iraq, and with differences among governorates.

- **Households reported greater reductions in the number of members employed in casual labour, which could disproportionately impact vulnerable groups.** A higher proportion of households reported a reduction in the number of members in irregular work⁶ or casual labour⁷ (26 percent) compared to household members in permanent positions (13 percent).⁸ At the same time, data suggested that employment was shifting towards sectors more likely to include casual or daily working arrangements, such as construction, particularly for vulnerable populations such as youth and the displaced.
- **To manage reduced income, households turned to economic coping mechanisms.** Seventy percent of households reported starting to use or increasing the use of methods to obtain additional income, such as taking on loans or debts and borrowing money. Households also reported not buying necessary non-food items (27 percent), buying less food (30 percent) and not buying clothing (21 percent) to reduce household expenses.
- **Reported household debt decreased more than it increased.** At the national level, 11 percent of households reported experiencing an increase in debt, compared to 22 percent reporting decreased debt since the start of the pandemic. Some respondents in individual interviews highlighted an increase in lenders forcing debtors to pay back their loans and debts, or forgiving their debts, which could have contributed to this reduction. Additionally, 35 percent of households reported using savings to replace income since the start of the pandemic.

- **Some indicators suggested limited impacts from the pandemic.** For example, there were few reported impacts on housing and shelter; water, sanitation and hygiene; and relocation choices. Similarly, 82 percent of households reported no change in stress levels and/or interpersonal conflict among household members, and 93 percent reported no change in community tensions.
- **Women and female-headed households reported greater impacts in some areas, but not all.** While individual female and male household members reported similar impacts on employment income, a higher proportion of respondents from female-headed households reported that the number of household members earning income from permanent and casual employment had changed. Further, 16 percent of households reported that, since the pandemic, the number of geographical areas deemed insecure for women and girls had increased. A higher proportion of women (35 percent) than men (25 percent) reported staying at home almost all of the time as a consequence of the movement restrictions.
- **Households in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq and Federal Iraq were differently impacted.** A greater proportion of households in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq reported experiencing

complete lockdowns where movement restrictions prevented them from accessing their work. They also reported complying with the restrictions to a higher degree. Perhaps related, the reported reduction in average monthly employment income was more than double for households there compared to those in Federal Iraq. The latter, however, were more likely to report that reductions in their income were directly or indirectly related to the pandemic.

- **Governorate-level differences underscore a need for contextualized and specific interventions.** Indicators on employment income, reduction in the proportion of household members working in casual labour and use of food coping strategies suggested that some of the greatest impacts have been felt in northern governorates such as al-Sulaymaniyah, Erbil and Ninewa. Households in Baghdad had the highest proportion of households with a decreased number of working days in an average month. Al-Basrah reported the highest number of households with informal workers. These geographic differences, coupled with additional indicative differences observed for households in rural and urban locations, underscore a need to target interventions to diverse contexts across the country.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1 Objective

This assessment aimed to evaluate the impact of the COVID-19 crisis on socioeconomic conditions and livelihoods at the household level in Iraq. It investigated the impact of COVID-19 on access to goods and services to meet basic needs, as well as if, and how, reduced freedom of movement and social tensions resulting from the pandemic have impacted the socioeconomic status of the population. The assessment explored how this impact was different for vulnerable groups, such as women, youth, children, persons with disabilities and displaced communities. It looked at the resilience and potential futures of people with decreased livelihood opportunities since the outbreak of COVID-19. Finally, it considered if and how the pandemic and associated public health measures such as lockdowns affected the stability of employment sectors, businesses and enterprises.

This assessment will inform the development of clear policy recommendations and programming responses by the Government of Iraq, development actors, the United Nations system, civil society organizations and other stakeholders. Please see the accompanying policy brief, “The Socio-economic Impact of COVID-19 on Iraq’s Vulnerable Populations”, for additional information.

3.2 Area of study and population of interest

Data for this assessment were collected in all 18 governorates of Iraq (Map 1). The assessment included all population groups (host community members, internally displaced persons or IDPs, refugees and returnees) across Iraq, in both rural and urban areas.⁹

3.3 Data collection strategy

The assessment employed a mixed-method approach with quantitative and qualitative data

collection. It included five components: a literature review, a quantitative household survey, key informant interviews, semi-structured individual interviews and area-based interviews.

3.3.1 Literature review

A literature review was conducted to understand existing information on socioeconomic trends and vulnerabilities in Iraq. It included data from the Central Organization for Statistics and Information Technology, the Kurdistan Regional Statistics Office, UNDP, other United Nations agencies, and humanitarian and development actors, as well as research produced by academics, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and research institutions. The knowledge gaps identified through the literature review served as the basis for developing assessment indicators related to employment and livelihoods, poverty, food security, living conditions and household vulnerability characteristics.

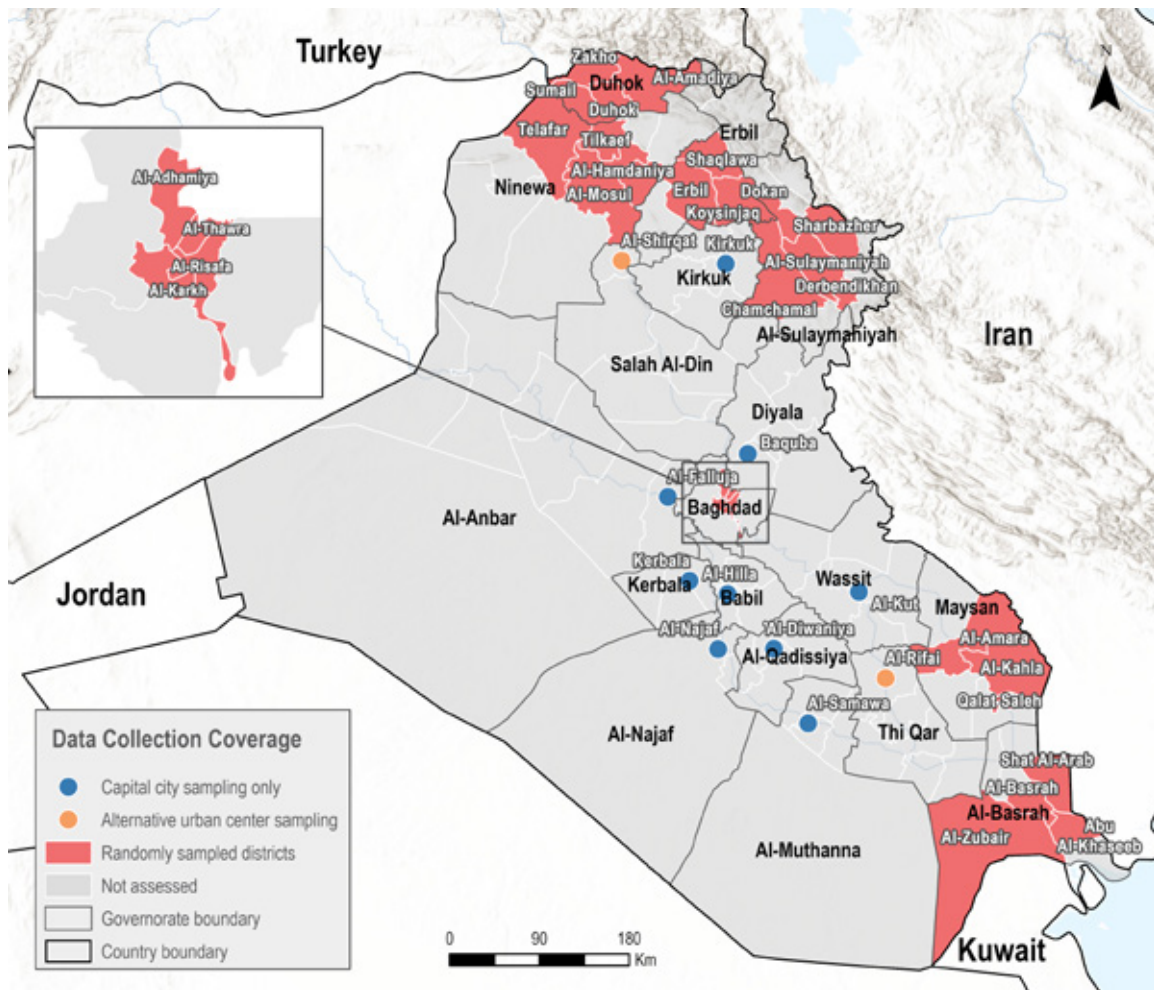
Criteria for identifying vulnerable groups for the household surveys and qualitative interviews were developed based on the literature review. A special focus was given to vulnerabilities related to gender, age and disabilities to better understand the socioeconomic impact of COVID-19 on these individuals.

3.3.2 Household survey

Surveys in each governorate involved a minimum of 198 households. To gain granular geographical understanding of needs, a stratified random sample was drawn for this component, generalizable for the assessed areas with a 95 percent confidence level and 7 percent margin of error at governorate level.

A two-stage random sampling strategy was used for the quantitative household survey. Based on population estimates drawn from the WorldPop raster dataset for Iraq from 2020,¹⁰ random global

Map 1: Household data collection coverage and sampling methodologies, by governorate



The designations employed and the presentation of the information in this map do not imply the expression of any opinion whatsoever on the part of the United Nations Development Programme concerning the legal status of any country, territory, city or area or of its authorities, or concerning the delimitation of its frontiers or boundaries

positioning system (GPS) points were generated within safely accessible and inhabited areas in each governorate. Within governorates, the random draw of GPS points was weighted by subdistrict population estimates. Per governorate, 34 GPS points were created. Each point was reviewed by safety and operations teams, and resampled if deemed inaccessible. Field teams visited each of the 34 points in person, and randomly selected six households to interview by applying a random walk method. The head of household was surveyed; if the head of household was not available, another household member over the age of 18 was asked to answer on behalf of the household. In total,

83 percent of the respondents were men and 17 percent were women.

To maximize the geographic scope of the assessment while accounting for access constraints, different sampling strategies were adopted across governorates depending on the local context. In Al-Basrah, Al-Sulaymaniyah, Baghdad, Duhok, Erbil, Maysan and Ninewa governorates, households were sampled across all accessible districts (indicated in red on Map 1),¹¹ while in Al-Anbar, Al-Muthanna, Al-Najaf, Al-Qadissiya, Babil, Diyala, Kerbala, Kirkuk and Wassit governorates, households were sampled

from within a 5-10-kilometer radius around the city centre of the governorate capital (indicated on Map 1 in blue). In Thi Qar and Salah Al-Din governorates, where the capital cities were not accessible for security reasons, points were sampled from other safely accessible, large urban centres (namely Rifai and Al-Shirqat, indicated on Map 1 in orange).

A total of 3,710 interviews were conducted between 13 December 2020 and 1 March 2021. The unit of analysis was the household, which is identified as a group of one or more persons sharing the same shelter and resources (such as food or money). Disaggregation of findings was done at the governorate level. In some cases, questions were answered at the individual level, which is highlighted wherever these findings are presented. Findings are presented across other demographic indicators such as gender, population group and vulnerability status where relevant, but these can only be seen as indicative as these population groups were not separately sampled for representativeness.

The breakdown of households by specific demographics and the gender of respondents is shown in Table 1.

The data collection tool was developed using the Open Data Kit and hosted on a KoBo Toolbox server. Translations were completed in-house by IMPACT Initiatives staff; the survey was made available to enumerators in English and Arabic.

3.3.3 Key informant interviews

Key informant interviews were conducted between 5 and 23 February 2021 with representatives from employment services organizations, employers, the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, the Ministry of Planning, the Ministry of Migration, the Ministry of Interior, and research institutions working on socioeconomic issues at the national and governorate levels.

Key informants were selected according to their expertise and involvement with services related to employment and socioeconomic conditions. Participants shed light on structures underlying access to employment and livelihood opportunities, helping to map the context in which households must navigate. UNDP provided a list of suitable interview participants that IMPACT Initiatives complemented with respondents from its own network (Table 2).

Table 1: Demographic breakdown of individuals from surveyed households¹²

	Male	Female	Total
Persons with disabilities	551	506	1,057
Children below 5	1,280	1,392	2,672
School-aged children (6-17)	2,204	2,135	4,339
Youth (10-24)	2,466	2,513	4,979
Adult (25-59)	3,576	3,447	7,023
Elderly (60+)	323	292	615
Female-headed households			696

Table 2: Completed key informant interviews by interview type, location, and urban/rural designation

	Federal Iraq		Kurdistan Region of Iraq		Total
	Urban	Rural	Urban	Rural	
Government	5	6	5	0	16
Workers' representatives	1	1	2	0	4
Large businesses	3	0	1	0	4
Employment services	0	2	1	0	3
Research institutions	0	1	0	0	1
Total	9	10	9	0	28

Due to different policies and institutions in Federal Iraq and the Kurdistan Region of Iraq, 19 key informant interviews were conducted in the former and 9 in the latter to ensure that impacts of these policies could be understood in each area. The main disaggregation of data from this component was between Federal Iraq and the Kurdistan Region of Iraq, while findings specific to any other key demographic indicators (gender, population group, vulnerability status) were collected from relevant key informant interviews. Interviews were conducted by phone in Arabic or Kurdish, using a semi-structured survey tool.

3.3.4 Semi-structured individual interviews

Interviews with individual community members helped develop an in-depth portrait of the context and lived experiences of vulnerable Iraqi households. They took place between 2 and 25 February 2021 with individuals selected according to certain characteristics. Data were qualitative and used to supplement the quantitative household survey with more contextual information; they therefore have to be seen as indicative.

Data were disaggregated by population group and gender, while findings specific to other key demographic indicators such as vulnerability or employment status were collected from participants. Respondents were selected based on several criteria, drawing on lists provided by UNDP and partner organizations, as well as the network of IMPACT Initiatives. Criteria included:

- *Gender*: female and male participants of different age groups
- *Population group*: host community, IDPs, returnees or refugees
- *Employment status*: employed (self-employed or with company/government/organization) and unemployed (recently due to or even before COVID-19)
- *Vulnerability status*: such as persons with disabilities, female-headed households, youth

Table 3 illustrates the final sample of individual interviews.

Table 3: Completed individual interviews by population group, gender of respondent and employment status

	Male		Female		Total
	Employed	Unemployed	Employed	Unemployed	
Host community	8	6	7	6	27
IDPs	6	5	6	6	23
Returnees	8	8	6	6	28
Refugees	3	2	3	3	11
Total	25	21	22	21	89

Host community, IDP and returnee participants were selected equally from locations in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq and Federal Iraq, while refugee participants were selected from the Kurdistan Region of Iraq only. Individual interviews were conducted with an equal number of male and female respondents to understand how livelihoods and socioeconomic impacts from COVID-19 could be experienced differently across genders.

3.3.5 In-depth area-based interviews

In-depth area-based interviews took place between 17 February and 1 March, involving between two and three participants in each target governorate. Semi-structured interviews with the same methodology as the key informant interviews

were held to gather rich, qualitative data focusing specifically on eight selected geographical areas: Al-Anbar, Al-Basrah, Al-Sulaymaniyah, Baghdad, Erbil, Muthana, Ninewa and Thi-Qar. These areas were selected in consultation with UNDP to provide a broad geographic overview and ensure that opinions were captured from respondents in both the Kurdistan Region of Iraq and Federal Iraq.

Participants were selected through purposive sampling with a breadth of expertise in livelihoods/ socioeconomic impacts and vulnerability in one of the eight chosen governorates. Findings should be treated as indicative (Table 4). Two locations in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq and six locations in Federal Iraq were selected to account for differences in context and conditions between the two areas.

Table 4: Completed area-based interviews by respondent type and location

	Mukhtar	Community/NGO	Operational actor	Total
Federal Iraq	9	8	2	19
Al-Anbar	2	1		3
Al-Basrah	2	1		3
Baghdad	1	2		3
Muthanna	1	1	1	3
Ninewa	2	1	1	4
Thi-Qar	1	2		3
Kurdistan Region of Iraq	2	3	1	6
Erbil	2	1		3
Al-Sulaymaniyah		2	1	3
Total	11	11	3	25

Participants included *mukhtars*, operational livelihood actors, and community and NGO representatives. The main disaggregation of data was among the eight locations. Findings specific to any other key demographic indicators (gender, population group, vulnerability status) were collected from relevant participants in this component and complemented by findings from the other components.

3.4 Analysis

Quantitative data from the household surveys was weighted by applying the latest available official population figures from the WorldPop Global High Resolution Population Denominators Project.¹³ This data source was chosen as it provided aggregation at the district and subdistrict levels, which facilitated weighting across the sampled areas. Once data collection was completed and the full data set was processed and cleaned,¹⁴ data were analysed using the statistical software R Studio.

Notes from the key informant, individual and area-based interviews were transcribed, and responses recorded through Kobo Toolbox. Analysis was conducted following standard processes for analysing qualitative data, including developing a comprehensive data saturation and analysis grid for each type of interview. The grid helped to identify relevant trends and linkages among the themes discussed.

3.5 Challenges and limitations

Given the complex security landscape and challenges of in-person data collection in Iraq, this assessment has certain limitations, namely:

- **Findings are statistically representative for areas directly sampled for this assessment.** Due to access constraints, field teams were only able to visit areas assessed as safe and reasonably accessible. This excluded regions such as border areas, areas with active militant

groups, and areas that could only be reached with an unrealistically high operational effort. As such, random household samples were drawn across a subset of realistically accessible districts and subdistricts, with the aim of maximizing geographic coverage across each governorate to the extent possible. Figures should therefore be interpreted as statistically representative only of the areas directly sampled, and indicative for the whole of Iraq. The resulting confidence level is high based on the large overall sample size, but may be biased in a way that doesn't fully represent the views of certain populations; namely, those living in areas with active conflict and the presence of armed groups, and those residing in particularly hard-to-reach, rural communities.

- **National figures are based on mixed sampling strategies.** To maximize the geographic scope of the assessment, in accordance with security and access constraints, different sampling strategies were deployed across the 18 governorates depending on the local context. Due to the adoption of a strategy focused on capitals in a number of governorates, national figures may be skewed towards urban populations.
- **Disaggregated figures should be interpreted as indicative, except for governorate stratifications.** The sampling strategy targeted statistical representativeness for governorate figures only. Other population group classifications (e.g., urban-rural classification, gender of head of household or other vulnerability criteria) were not formally sampled for representativeness; findings should be considered indicative. Figures based on only a subset of the population (e.g., follow-up questions) should be treated with the same caution as they may not meet the minimum sample size for statistical representativeness at the same level as other indicators. The sample size for many of these disaggregations remained sizable, however. Findings can be reasonably considered as representing the views of a large

proportion of the populations surveyed unless a particularly small sample size is noted.

Further limitations that should be considered include:

- **Figures reported at the individual level should be treated as indicative.** Given that the sampling strategy considered households as the primary unit of analysis, findings for individuals may only be indicative despite a large sample size.
- **The survey was administered to a single respondent per household answering on behalf of the household, including questions about individual family members.** All questions were answered by the head of household (or an adult household representative), who was assumed to report accurate information on the household as a whole and on individual members. Respondents were predominantly male. Given the scope of the assessment and associated time constraints, it was not possible to interview each household member directly. Therefore, responses were based on secondary reporting.
- **Data collection represented collaboration among different enumerator teams throughout Iraq.** The large geographic scope of in-person data collection required deploying enumerator teams throughout the country. Survey questions were asked by a diverse group of people, who may have interpreted or presented the questions slightly differently. Some teams were coordinated remotely, but in general, data collection was harmonized to the extent possible by conducting standardized trainings and quality checks. There was frequent follow-up with field teams.
- **Urban-rural disaggregation follows the overall classification of subdistricts.** A household could reside in a rural (or urban) area within a subdistrict that overall is classified as urban (or rural) and therefore will appear as urban (or rural) in the data.

- **Quantitative data collection was spread over a two-and-a-half-month period.** In some governorates this extended the recall period, particularly regarding questions on pre-

COVID-19 conditions prior to pre-February 2020. This issue was mitigated to the extent possible by indicating precise timeframes in the phrasing of survey questions.

4. CONTEXT OF LIVELIHOOD AND HOUSEHOLD VULNERABILITIES

As COVID-19 continues to spread, the Iraqi people and Government have faced health-related and socioeconomic impacts. After years of active conflict, 1.2 million Iraqis remain displaced and 4.85 million have returned to their areas of origin, which at times remain damaged or destroyed.¹⁵ In addition, during anti-government demonstrations that began in October 2019 and lasted until COVID-19 related movement restrictions forced a pause in April 2020, protesters gathered to demand access to jobs and basic services and an end to corruption. Compounding this political and health crisis is an economic crisis catalysed by the collapse of the price of oil since the beginning of 2020, in a country where 90 percent of tax revenue comes from oil.¹⁶

The convergence of these factors has impacted nearly all aspects of life for people within Iraq. From an economic perspective, employment and livelihoods opportunities have been heavily affected. While the public sector is the largest employer in the country and responsible for approximately 40 percent of jobs,¹⁷ an estimated 67 percent of all jobs are informal in nature, with almost all private sector workers employed informally.¹⁸ Employment was in decline even before the pandemic, with a rising unemployment rate and low labour force participation especially for women.¹⁹ Against this backdrop, the COVID-19 crisis and measures to prevent the spread of the virus affect the socioeconomic status and vulnerability of Iraq's population.

Studies indicate that one quarter of Iraqis employed before lockdown measures began had been permanently laid off by June 2020, with an additional 15 percent being temporarily laid off.²⁰

The employment rate has since increased, but in November 2020 was still on average 7 percent less than pre-pandemic numbers.²¹ The poverty level has increased and living conditions have been adversely affected, with an estimated 4.5 million additional Iraqis pushed below the poverty line. Among them, 14 percent are in female-headed households, 42 percent have experienced an economic, violence or displacement-related shock and not fully recovered, and 45 percent of household heads are unemployed.²²

The restrictions imposed in response to COVID-19 have also reportedly caused IDPs to lose their jobs. According to an assessment by the Protection Cluster in Iraq, 93 percent of out-of-camp IDP respondents reported experiencing unemployment and loss of livelihoods, compared to 86 percent of in-camp respondents.²³ Income levels for most Iraqi households have decreased, and as a result, access to food has declined and more households have reported resorting to various coping mechanisms to meet their needs.

The Iraqi health system, already under strain before the pandemic, has struggled to keep up with increased demand by affected populations. In addition to a greater caseload, health-care workers have been exposed to the virus at higher rates and are estimated to represent 4.7 percent of all reported infections.²⁴

The impact of the pandemic is likely much worse for vulnerable populations. Evidence suggests that children have been particularly impacted, with the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) expecting 2 out of every 5 children to be below the national poverty line as the crisis unfolds,

compared to 1 out of 5 beforehand.²⁵ School closures²⁶ have impacted more than 7 million children.²⁷ Geographically, governorates with the most vulnerable populations are in either Northern or Southern Iraq, followed by the governorates of the centre, with the governorates of the Kurdistan Region of Iraq having the lowest expected vulnerability.²⁸

To mitigate critical issues related to the COVID-19 pandemic, the humanitarian community began prioritizing life-saving interventions in early May 2020 as well as mapping humanitarian activities related to COVID-19 preparedness and response.²⁹ The Government of Iraq and other Iraqi institutions have also put measures in place to mitigate the impact of the pandemic. For example, the

Central Bank of Iraq has, through its direct lending initiative One Trillion ID, announced a moratorium on interest and principal payments by small and medium-sized enterprises. Furthermore, the bank has launched payment holidays, deferral of loan interest and general liquidity facilities.³⁰ The Iraqi Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs funded a one-time cash disbursement initiative called the Minha Programme, and enacted measures to exempt stakeholders in agriculture from movement restrictions, allowing them to continue the production and transport of agricultural goods.³¹

Despite these mitigation measures, the impacts of the pandemic continue to be felt by populations across the country, particularly the most vulnerable households.

5. KEY FINDINGS

This section will present key findings of the assessment in four thematic areas: the changes in socioeconomic circumstances during the pandemic, the impacts of movement restrictions on livelihoods and basic needs, impacts on vulnerable households, and impacts on economic sectors, businesses and enterprises.

5.1 Changes in socioeconomic circumstances during the pandemic

This section considers impacts on household employment and livelihoods. Findings are categorized by the following topics:

- Employment circumstances
- Livelihood coping strategies
- Unpaid household work
- Non-employment income
- Financial security
- Food security
- Housing and shelter
- Water, sanitation and hygiene standards and environment

- Basic needs
- Tensions and stress levels
- Movement restrictions

5.1.1 Employment circumstances

This section highlights findings in terms of COVID-19's impacts on household income, type of employment prior to and post-COVID-19, and impacts on the number of working days.

5.1.1.1 Impacts on income

Households reported a decrease in their average monthly employment income over the course of the pandemic. Prior to the start of the pandemic in February 2020, average reported income from employment for households was 594,239 Iraqi dinar (IQD) (US \$412.70) per month.³² At the time of data collection, **this amount had decreased by 16 percent for households (97,301 IQD or \$67.60).** This decrease was reportedly higher for households in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq, compared to those in Federal Iraq (see Table 5).

In the Kurdistan Region of Iraq, all three governorates experienced a decrease of at least 29 percent, whereas the worst-affected governorates in Federal Iraq were Al-Najaf, Kirkuk and Ninewa, which experienced a decrease between 17 and

27 percent. The least-affected governorates were Wassit with a 4 percent decrease, Al-Muthana, Maysan and Thi-Qar with 6 percent, and Baghdad with 7 percent.

Table 5: Average reported change in monthly household employment income, by location

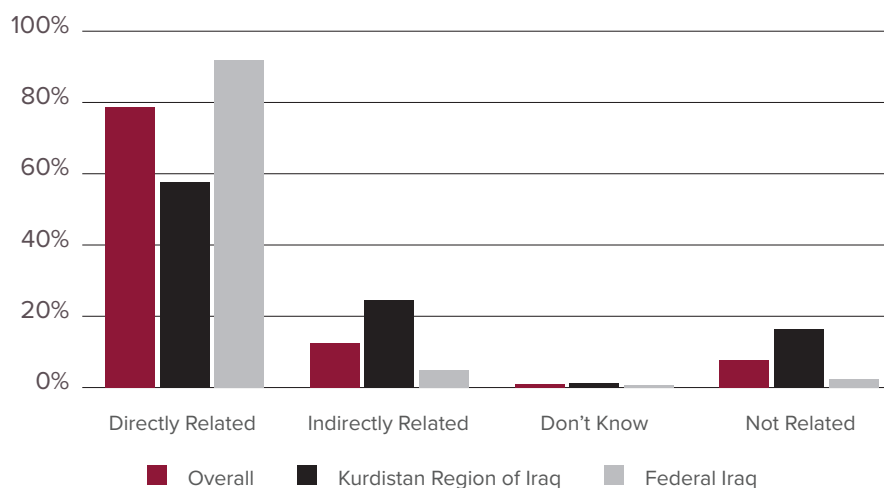
	Monthly average income before the pandemic, IQD	Monthly average income at time of interview, IQD	Reported change, IQD	Percentage change
Federal Iraq	618,011	544,746	-73,265	-12
Al-Anbar	607,289	544,764	-62,525	-10
Al-Basrah	884,868	762,171	-122,697	-14
Al-Muthanna	762,055	714,282	-47,773	-6
Al-Najaf	572,025	473,332	-98,693	-17
Al-Qadissiya	576,892	506,373	-70,519	-12
Babil	572,818	510,422	-62,396	-11
Baghdad	654,902	608,652	-46,250	-7
Diyala	597,412	526,525	-70,887	-12
Kerbala	614,400	532,732	-81,668	-13
Kirkuk	422,143	332,802	-89,341	-21
Maysan	640,294	603,456	-36,838	-6
Ninewa	397,727	289,394	-108,333	-27
Salah-al-Din	519,282	434,216	-85,066	-16
Thi-Qar	731,281	687,069	-44,212	-6
Wassit	750,625	719,491	-31,134	-4
Kurdistan Region of Iraq	526,570	361,099	-165,471	-31
Al-Sulaymaniyah	408,014	288,414	-119,600	-29
Duhok	609,306	400,931	-208,375	-35
Erbil	544,131	384,021	-160,110	-29
Overall	594,239	496,938	-97,301	-16

Reported reduction in employment income was echoed in data from individual interviews. The majority of respondents (60) reported experiencing a reduction in employment income between the start of the pandemic and the point when they were interviewed. Most attributed this loss to COVID-19-related restrictions. A few related it to non-COVID-19 reasons, such as the end of a contract and changes in work ability due to other health reasons. **Key informants from the Government reported that they were the least affected by the economic downturn.**

The household survey showed that the pandemic impacted **men’s and women’s employment income to similar degrees.**³³ Prior to the start of the pandemic, 5 percent of female household members reportedly had income from working, compared to 4 percent at the time of the interview. For male household members, 54 percent had income from working prior to the pandemic, compared to 51 percent at the time of the interview.³⁴

When household survey respondents were asked whether the change in monthly employment income was related to the COVID-19 pandemic or its associated measures and restrictions, 79 percent reported that it was directly related. An additional 13 percent reported that it was indirectly related, and **8 percent reported that they did not believe the reduction was related to the pandemic.** The proportion of households reporting that the change in monthly employment income was directly related to COVID-19 was higher in Federal Iraq (92 percent) than the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (58 percent). See Figure 1. The proportion was also higher in urban locations (82 percent) compared to rural locations (72 percent).³⁵

Figure 1: Proportion of households reporting a relationship between changes in employment income and the COVID-19 pandemic, by location



Individual interview respondents who reported not having decreased employment income between the start of the pandemic and the time of the interview were primarily employed by an NGO, educational institution or the Government. Both individual and area-based interview respondents **indicated that receiving their overall monthly income was sometimes delayed after the start of the pandemic, either due to banks being closed, or because they received a government pension as a widow/person with disabilities/retiree and their check was late.**

“My chances to get a job are less than before COVID-19 because the job opportunities decreased due to many of the companies closing or stopping work because of the effects of COVID-19 on the economic situation and because of the bad economic situation in (the Kurdistan Region of Iraq).”

— Unemployed urban male respondent,
Kurdistan Region of Iraq

Of households experiencing a **decrease in employment income** since the start of the pandemic,³⁶ the **most frequently reported reason**

was a reduced number of working days in an average month (66 percent, or 993 households). This would most likely relate primarily to casual workers because permanent workers’ contracts would not be as susceptible to fluctuations in working hours and days. Other common reasons were household members receiving lower income in the same job (34 percent), a household member having lost his/her job (21 percent) and having a lower income from a different job (8 percent).³⁷ See Table 6.

The proportion of households reporting a decreased number of working days in an average month was highest in Baghdad (81 percent), followed by Al-Basrah (80 percent) and Kirkuk (80 percent). The latter two were among the governorates with the highest number of households, including informal workers (Al-Basrah at 22 percent and Kirkuk at 11 percent), whereas Baghdad had a small proportion of households with informal workers (3 percent). Maysan had the highest proportion of households reporting lower income from the same job (70 percent), followed by Babil (65 percent) and Kerbala (53 percent). No households in Baghdad or Al-Najaf reported that lost jobs had reduced household income since the start of the pandemic.

Table 6: Top four reasons for decreased household employment income since the start of the pandemic, by governorate

	Decreased number of working days in the same job/work, percentage	Lower income in the same job/work, percentage	Household member lost job/work, percentage	Lower income in different job/work, percentage
Al-Anbar	68	28	3.5	2
Al-Basrah	80	14	57	4
Al-Muthanna	55	48	32	10
Al-Najaf	66	52	0	15
Al-Qadissiya	69	44	1	3
Al-Sulaymaniyah	69	49	15	9
Babil	42	65	2	2
Baghdad	81	38	0	4

	Decreased number of working days in the same job/work, percentage	Lower income in the same job/work, percentage	Household member lost job/work, percentage	Lower income in different job/work, percentage
Diyala	76	45	17	9
Duhok	61	39	15	5
Erbil	60	52	4	8
Kerbala	56	53	1	19
Kirkuk	80	48	9	20
Maysan	48	70	9	28
Ninewa	68	14	36	0
Salah-al-Din	44	14	41	5
Thi-Qar	47	42	25	8
Wassit	39	44	7	10
Overall	66	34	21	8

“The job opportunities decrease every day and the number of job seekers increases. So if I lose my job I will try to look for another one.”

— Employed urban male respondent, Kurdistan Region of Iraq

Individual interview respondents who reported losing their job also said that although they searched for new work, they did not expect to find it. Limited work existed before the pandemic; jobs had become scarcer as a result of health restrictions. **Nearly all individual interviewees also indicated that they expected the economic downturn to be temporary** and hoped that their prior jobs would return as restrictions were rolled back.

5.1.1.2 Type of employment

Fifty-eight percent of households reported that prior to the start of the pandemic, they had at least one member employed in casual work,

and 39 percent reported at least one member had been working in permanent employment. Among household members having income from work prior to the pandemic (3,862 male and 283 female household members), the proportion of male household members working in casual work (61 percent) was higher than female household members (38 percent). A higher proportion of employed female household members were in permanent employment (57 percent) compared to male household members (38 percent).^{38,39}

“The daily workers and those who were working with the private sector have been badly affected by the steps that were taken to prevent COVID-19. Many of them lost their job, had their salary lowered, or their working hours and wage reduced.”

— Key informant, urban government, Kurdistan Region of Iraq

A higher proportion of households reported a reduction in the number of members working in casual labour (26 percent) compared to household members in permanent positions (13 percent). This indicates that household members in casual labour were more likely to lose jobs, a difference consistent across all governorates, with

the highest changes reported in Al-Sulaymaniyah and Erbil in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq, and Ninewa, Kerbala and Al-Najaf in Federal Iraq (see Table 7). Male household members reported working in casual labour at higher rates than female household members.

Table 7: Proportion of households reporting a reduction in the number of members with permanent or casual work, by governorate

	Fewer household members in permanent work, percentage	Fewer household members in casual work, percentage
Al-Anbar	19	23
Al-Basrah	28	35
Al-Muthanna	1	2
Al-Najaf	12	33
Al-Qadissiya	14	14
Al-Sulaymaniyah	34	60
Babil	8	17
Baghdad	9	14
Diyala	2	9
Duhok	12	18
Erbil	14	33
Kerbala	16	30
Kirkuk	11	25
Maysan	3	6
Ninewa	4	36
Salah-al-Din	18	22
Thi-Qar	2	3
Wassit	1	2
Overall	13	26

Table 8: Proportion of individual household members reporting sector of employment, before the pandemic and at the time of the interview

	Prior to March 2020, percentage	At the time of the interview, percentage
Construction	24	37
Vocational (carpenter, electrician, plumber, handyman, etc.)	12	24
Government	9	0
Education	7	4
Small business owner	7	5
Agriculture, forestry or fishing	6	9

The majority of government key informants stated that those with daily pay or casual labour arrangements were most affected by the pandemic because many projects that employ them had stalled.

Individual household members⁴⁰ also reported changes in their sector of employment at the time of the interview, compared to before the pandemic. The biggest changes were an **increase in the proportion of individuals working in construction and vocational positions** (+13 percent) and a **decrease in the proportion working in government jobs** (-9 percent) (see Table 8).

The increase in the proportion of individual household members reporting work in construction was highest in Thi Qar (51 percent) and Al-Najaf (39 percent). The proportion in construction decreased in certain governorates, including Babil (-14 percent) and Kerbala (-11 percent). This is consistent with data in Table 7, indicating that households in these areas reported fewer members in casual work since the start of the pandemic. It could also imply that there were no construction jobs available in these governorates.

The reported shift towards employment sectors more likely to include casual working

arrangements, such as construction and vocational employment, is likely to have **disproportionately affected the most vulnerable; qualitative interview respondents reported that vulnerable populations such as youth and displaced or formerly displaced households were more likely to be employed in casual work**. As employment increases in sectors with more casual or daily working arrangements, while decreasing in other more stable sectors such as the government, negative impacts on vulnerable populations could continue to increase.

“The industrial and agricultural sectors would generate the most chances for unemployed people in this area, but there isn’t much support from the government to fix the problems of unemployed workers.”

— Area-based interview respondent, Erbil

Of the 6 percent of households with individual members reported as working in agriculture,⁴¹ almost half (42 percent or 75 households) reported changes in agricultural activities compared to before the COVID-19 pandemic. These changes included high input prices, limited access to money or credit and low market prices. One quarter of

households (25 percent or 45 households) with individual members working in agriculture reported that agricultural input prices were now higher, 12 percent reported that they had no access to money or credit to support agricultural activities, and 10 percent reported lower market prices.⁴² These findings align with secondary data showing that market prices initially experienced a shock at the start of the pandemic, before stabilizing,⁴³ and then experienced a second steep increase based on the devaluation of the Iraqi dinar in early 2021.⁴⁴

5.1.1.3 Impacts on working days

In addition to impacts on income and types of employment, households were asked about effects on the number of working days for individuals in the household. Overall, **17 percent of households (or 538 households) had at least one member reporting fewer working days in an average month since the start of the pandemic**; 7 percent of households had at least one member reporting shorter working days.^{45,46}

“Most of the government offices closed or attended only 50 percent, then 25 percent, of days that they used to because of an increase in cases of the virus among the employees and the people who come to the government offices. So many of the plans, projects, and the jobs of the municipalities, courts and civil documents stopped.”

— Key informant, urban government, Kurdistan Region of Iraq

The proportion of households with members reporting fewer working days was slightly higher for households in rural areas (22 percent) versus urban areas (15 percent), while there was no difference in the proportion reporting shorter working days between rural and urban areas.⁴⁷ Similar shares of households reported reduced working days as a reason for decreased income.

Al-Sulaymaniyah had the highest proportion of households with at least one member reporting both fewer working days and shorter working days

(see Table 9). Al-Anbar had the smallest proportion reporting both types of change.

Table 9: Top two types of employment changes reported by households, by governorate⁴⁸

	Fewer working days	Shorter working days
Al-Anbar	5	1
Al-Basrah	22	5
Al-Muthanna	4	8
Al-Najaf	6	4
Al-Qadissiya	8	3
Al-Sulaymaniyah	37	22
Babil	7	3
Baghdad	6	3
Diyala	20	10
Duhok	28	6
Erbil	36	11
Kerbala	12	5
Kirkuk	25	17
Maysan	8	7
Ninewa	14	8
Salah-al-Din	5	5
Thi-Qar	8	3
Wassit	7	1
Overall	17	7

5.1.2 Household livelihood coping strategies

Households were asked to report whether, since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, they had started using or increased the use of methods to reduce expenses. The **three most commonly reported**

coping strategies were: not buying necessary non-food household items (37 percent), buying less food (30 percent) and not buying clothing (21 percent). Six individual interview respondents stated that they needed routine medical care or prescriptions but chose to forgo these services to save money.

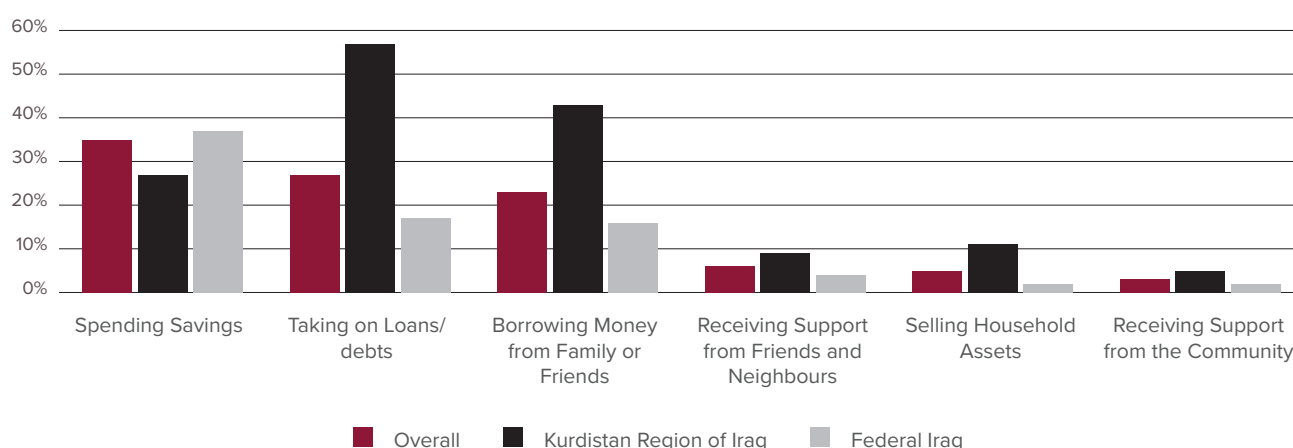
The proportion of households that reported buying less food as a coping mechanism was higher in rural areas (42 percent) than in urban areas (26 percent).⁴⁹ This could indicate several things: that rural households decreased their food purchases to a greater extent, that rural households were to a higher degree able to rely on home-produced consumables or that urban households had less scope to reduce in this area to begin with. Food security is discussed in more detail below.

A higher proportion of female-headed households reported buying less food (41 percent) compared to male-headed households (28 percent),⁵⁰ which could indicate either that they were purchasing extra food before the pandemic and therefore had more scope to reduce this expenditure, or that their ability to reduce expenditure in other areas was more limited than that of male-headed households. The proportions reporting that they were not buying necessary non-food household items and

not buying clothing were consistent across both groups. No female-headed households reported any household members needing to be forcibly married as a method of reducing expenses. This was reported by only one male-headed household.

In addition to reducing expenditure, **70 percent of households reported that they had started using or increased the use of methods to obtain additional income. These included spending savings (35 percent), taking on loans or debts (27 percent) and borrowing money (23 percent).** No households reported taking on additional jobs to increase their income, which is likely related to the overall reduction in available jobs during the pandemic. Furthermore, **29 percent of households reported not needing to resort to any methods to obtain additional income during the pandemic.**⁵¹ See Figure 2.

Figure 2: Proportion of households reporting using or increasing methods for obtaining additional income, by location

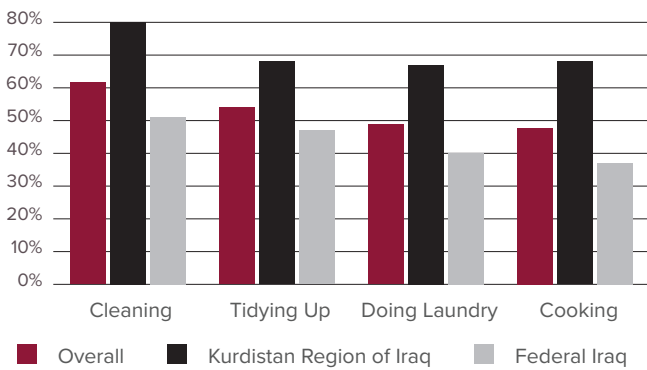


5.1.3 Impacts on unpaid household work

Each household was asked to report whether there had been a change in how much time its members spent on unpaid household work as a consequence of the pandemic. Ninety percent of households reported that there had been no change to the amount of time. Only **8 percent of household members**⁵² had more tasks and household work such as taking care of children, cooking, cleaning, and looking after disabled or elderly household members. This proportion was marginally higher for females (10 percent) compared to males (6 percent).

Among individuals who reported more tasks and housework due to COVID-19 (8 percent), the top four types of tasks that increased were cleaning (61 percent), tidying up (54 percent), laundry (49 percent) and cooking (48 percent).⁵³ See Figure 3.

Figure 3: Proportion of households reporting that household members spend more time on unpaid household work or took on more tasks since the start of the pandemic, by location



The survey identified a striking difference between genders regarding types of household tasks that increased. Among individuals spending more time on household tasks, 91 percent of females spent more time cleaning, compared to 15 percent of males. Females also spent more time cooking (75 percent) compared to males (7 percent). Male household members spent more time repairing things (69 percent) compared to females (8 percent).

Overall, women reportedly took on a bigger share of increased household chores, suggesting that the pandemic has negatively affected a disproportionate share of women in the home sphere, while further reinforcing traditional gender roles.

5.1.4 Impacts on non-employment income

Surveyed households reported an **average reduction of 17 percent per month in non-employment income since the start of the pandemic (20,515 IQD or \$14.20)**.⁵⁴ The average reported change in monthly non-employment income was higher in Federal Iraq compared to the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (see Table 10). A higher proportion of households in Federal Iraq reported reductions in non-employment income sources such as remittances and pensions, while figures were consistent across other types of non-employment income. A very small proportion of households in al-Sulaymaniyah and Al-Muthanna (less than 1 percent) reported decreases in their non-employment income, and in Erbil, households actually reported increases.

Table 10: Reported changes in average monthly household non-employment income, by location of household

	Monthly average non-employment income before the COVID-19 pandemic, IQD	Monthly average non-employment income at the time of the interview, IQD	Reported change, IQD	Percentage change
Federal Iraq	120,929	95,892	-25,307	-21
Al-Anbar	76,215	58,789	-17,426	-23
Al-Basrah	108,883	72,690	-36,193	-33
Al-Muthanna	40,314	39,896	-418	-1
Al-Najaf	71,436	58,812	-12,624	-18
Al-Qadissiya	50,132	48,328	-1,804	-4
Babil	29,657	23,489	-6,168	-21
Baghdad	177,221	136,128	-41,093	-23
Diyala	114,162	127,446	13,284	12
Kerbala	45,190	42,946	-2,244	-5
Kirkuk	117,611	103,415	-14,196	-12
Maysan	101,970	90,887	-11,083	-11
Ninewa	62,253	55,283	-6,970	-11
Salah-al-Din	335,980	308,818	-27,162	-8
Thi-Qar	40,025	37,960	-2,065	-5
Wassit	120,347	105,532	-14,815	-12
Kurdistan Region of Iraq	107,829	101,356	-6,473	-6
Al-Sulaymaniyah	101,010	101,289	279	0.3
Duhok	153,381	122,275	-31,106	-20
Erbil	57,889	75,198	17,309	30
Overall	117,738	97,223	-20,515	-17

Among households that reported experiencing a decrease in non-employment income, the most commonly reported losses related to income from retirement or pensions (27 percent) and remittances (27 percent). Households with elderly members

relying on pension income were more likely to be impacted by changes in non-employment income.

Overall, **the average reduction in non-employment income was smaller than the**

reduction in employment income for households in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (-31 percent in employment income versus -6 percent for non-employment income), **while the inverse was true for households in Federal Iraq** (-12 percent for employment income, compared to -20 percent for non-employment income). This could be related to the fact that non-employment income was higher to begin with in Federal Iraq, and there was more scope for potential reduction.

Households that reported receiving support from friends or neighbours, their community, the United Nations or NGOs, the Government or religious organizations (6 percent overall) were asked to specify what type of support they had received. Of this group, 97 percent (232 households) reported receiving cash assistance. Other types of support included food items, non-food assistance, clothes and cleaning supplies.

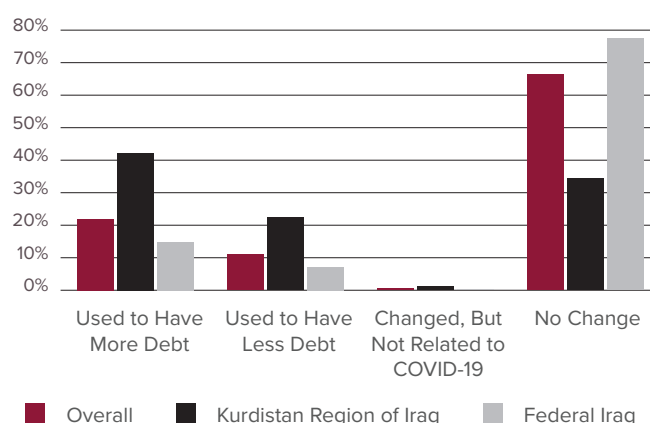
5.1.5 Impacts on financial security

Beyond income, one indicator of household financial security is household debt. Overall, **the majority of households (66 percent) reported that there was no change in their household debt amount as a result of the pandemic**. This proportion was higher in Federal Iraq (77 percent) than the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (34 percent), and slightly higher for male-headed households (68 percent) than female-headed households (58 percent).⁵⁵ Among the 70 percent share of households who reported using or increasing coping strategies, 27 percent reported taking loans or debts, and 23 percent reported borrowing money. Coupled with the findings below, this could indicate that households were paying back existing debt while simultaneously taking additional debt without an overall impact on their total household debt.

Of households that reported a change in their household debt amount, **in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq, a larger proportion said that their average household debt had decreased (42 percent) rather than increased (22 percent)**. This was consistent

with households in Federal Iraq, to a lesser extent (in 15 percent debt decreased, and in 7 percent it increased). See Figure 4. A change in debt was slightly higher for female-headed households (26 percent) than male-headed households (21 percent), although to a nominal degree.⁵⁶ These patterns could represent a positive reduction in the need to take on additional debt, or that households were unable to find lenders to obtain a debt or buy on credit. Some individual interview respondents indicated an increase in lenders forcing debtors to pay back their loans and debts, or forgiving their debts, which could also have contributed to a reduction.

Figure 4: Proportion of households reporting a change in household debt due to the COVID-19 pandemic, by location⁵⁷



For households that reported **less debt before the pandemic** (11 percent, or 386 households), most (40 percent) reported that their debt had increased by less than 100,000 IQD (\$69.40), while 36 percent reported that it had increased by between 100,000 and 1 million IQD (\$69.40 and \$694.40). For households with **more debt before the pandemic** (22 percent, or 658 households), the majority (67 percent) reported that the decrease in their amount of debt was between 100,000 to 1 million IQD (\$69.40 and \$694.40). An additional 18 percent reported that their debt had decreased by between 1 and 3 million IQD (\$694.4 and \$2083.3). For **households that reported a change in their debt as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, the average amount of household debt was more likely to have decreased than increased**.

The vast majority of households (91 percent) did not report experiencing a change in the number of high-value items they owned such as cars, televisions, smart phones, personal computers, motorcycles, refrigerators or freezers. This proportion was slightly higher for households in urban locations (93 percent) compared to rural locations (84 percent). Of those that did report a change in the number of these assets, a greater share comprised female-headed-households (14 percent, 71 households) compared to male-headed households (2 percent, 51 households).⁵⁸ This could potentially be related to proportionately smaller decreases in income experienced by female-headed households.

A very small proportion of households reported an increase in children working as a result of the pandemic. Out of all households, only eight (less

than 1 percent) reported that children had to work to provide income. An additional two households reported that children began working because of school closures or because it was too difficult to get to school, and two reported that children had started working because their families could no longer afford to pay school fees.

5.1.6 Impacts on food security

The majority of households (66 percent, or 2,650 households) reported that they did not start or increase coping strategies to get enough food. The most commonly reported coping strategies were eating fewer meals (19 percent), eating smaller meals (16 percent) and receiving food from relatives (7 percent). See Table 11.

Table 11: Top three most frequently reported coping strategies for obtaining enough food for the household, by urban or rural location⁵⁹

	Eating fewer meals, percentage	Eating smaller meals, percentage	Receiving food from relatives, ⁶⁰ percentage
Overall	19	16	7
Urban households	17	13	7
Rural households	26	22	5

The proportion of female- and male-headed households reporting fewer or smaller meals was similar. A higher proportion of female-headed households reported receiving food from relatives (18 percent) compared to male-headed households (4 percent).⁶¹ Female-headed households may have been able to rely more on external family and community support.

The proportion of households reporting that they consumed fewer meals was highest in Al-

Sulaymaniyah (56 percent of households) and lowest in Al-Muthanna and Maysan (less than 1 percent). Al-Sulaymaniyah also had the highest proportion of households reporting that they ate smaller meals (50 percent), and a comparatively higher proportion of households reporting receipt of food from relatives or the community, suggesting that households there were among the most food insecure. As of June 2020, Babil and Diyala were assessed as having the highest proportions of households using negative

food coping strategies.⁶² These governorates had relatively small proportions of households reporting food coping strategies at the time of data collection, which could indicate improved food security or that the high proportion of households using these strategies pre-pandemic resulted in a comparatively small increase during the pandemic.

One element determining household decisions to eat fewer or smaller meals was the price of food items. One individual interview respondent described an increase in prices due to the pandemic:

“Our abilities to meet our needs depends on the availability of the jobs. Most people suffer from...a lack of job opportunities and the economic situation in Iraq, and an increase of the prices of food items because of the steps that the Government took, which led to the Iraqi dinar to lose its value with the US dollar.”

— Employed rural female in an individual interview, Kurdistan Region of Iraq

5.1.7 Impacts on housing and shelter

Nearly all households (98 percent) reported no change to their housing and shelter as a result of the pandemic. Indicatively, this proportion was consistent across all population groups, regardless of displacement status. Eighty-six percent of households reported that they always or mostly received power from a generator, and 84 percent said that this had not changed since the start of the pandemic. Of those that did report a change, 9 percent said that they mostly received power from a generator since the start of the pandemic, and 6 percent reported that the generator was their only source of power.

One area-based interview respondent from Erbil highlighted that refugees who live in rented houses were among the most severely affected population groups, because most depended on income from daily labour and were prevented from working

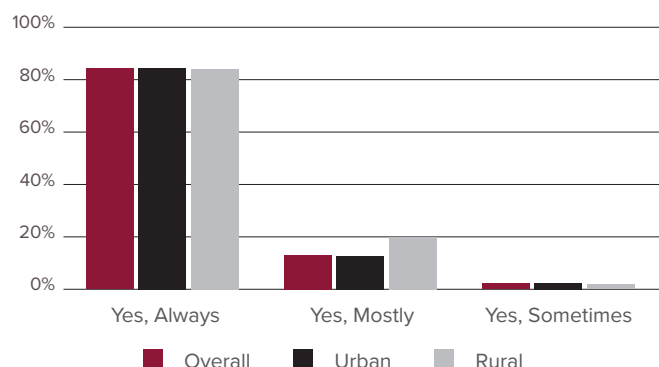
due to COVID-19 restrictions. They therefore had a reduced ability to pay rent. Although the Government has instituted certain schemes, such as a three-month deferral on payments for loans from the Government’s Housing Fund,⁶³ it was not immediately clear whether these measures would support refugee households.

5.1.8 Impacts on WASH standards and environment

Water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) standards were another area where households reported relatively minimal impacts, **with 84 percent indicating no negative changes**. The most reported change was not having access to sufficient water for drinking and domestic purposes (11 percent of households). The proportion of households reporting this was higher in rural locations (17 percent) than urban locations (9 percent). See Figure 5. Other negative changes reported by a small proportion of households included not having access to a functional sanitation facility (4 percent) and not having access to a handwashing facility with soap in the previous month (2 percent).

Overall, **75 percent of households reported that their water usage had not changed**, while 24 percent said that their water usage had increased.⁶⁴ **Less than 1 percent of households reported decreasing their water usage**. With household members likely to be at home more often during the pandemic, and the majority of households reporting that they always or mostly have access to a sufficient quantity of water for drinking and household purposes (97 percent), the lack of increase may be due to households adjusting their water usage. The lack of increase could indicate that frequent handwashing to limit the spread of COVID-19 has not become common practice, or that households do not expect this to have significantly increased their water usage.

Figure 5: Proportion of households reporting access to sufficient quantities of water in the month prior to data collection, by urban or rural location⁶⁵



Nearly three quarters (72 percent) of households reported not noticing a change in the amount of waste and litter in streets or other public places as a consequence of the pandemic. Of households that did report a change, most described more waste in the streets (26 percent).⁶⁶ Among the area-based interview respondents, just under half (8) did not report any changes in waste and litter in the streets of their areas. Of those who did notice

a change (12), most reported an increase due to greater use of disposable materials, fewer workers to collect the waste (normally daily workers), and people being home more and producing more waste. The area-based respondents who described less waste and litter argued that it was because of decreased movement, and lower purchasing and consumption of materials.

5.1.9 Impacts on basic needs

Households were asked to report on three priority basic needs during the month prior to the start of the pandemic (February 2020) and then within the month prior to the interview. The **most commonly reported needs were having enough money for food, having access to health care, having access to food, having money to buy medicines and having access to education. Reported needs for households were largely consistent at the national level** (see Table 12) and across households in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq and Federal Iraq.

Table 12: Top five most frequently reported priority needs before and during the pandemic⁶⁷

	Prior to the pandemic, percentage	At the time of the interview, percentage
Having enough money for food	57	60
Having access to health care	55	56
Having access to food	44	49
Having money to buy medicines	35	39
Having access to education	13	14

“Access to hospitals is the most important need of all people, but after the COVID-19 pandemic, people have been unable to reach this service, because they are afraid of getting coronavirus.”

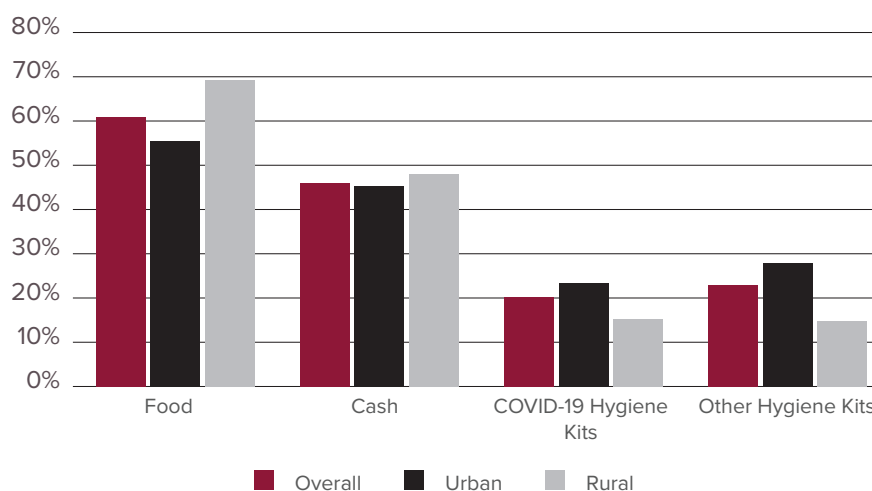
— Rural government key informant, Federal Iraq

Approximately one quarter of individual interview respondents (21 respondents) reported being unable to fulfil their current needs in a given month at the time of the interview. One of the main reported deficits was in meeting medical needs. Household survey participants were asked whether there was a change in how hard it was to obtain medical assistance as a consequence of the pandemic. Overall, 56 percent of households reported not experiencing a change, a figure consistent across both rural

and urban households.⁶⁸ Conversely, **44 percent of households reported that it became harder to access medical assistance as a result of the pandemic**, which was also consistent across both rural and urban locations.⁶⁹ Fourteen individual interview respondents described needing medical care, including routine medical care, with four reporting being hesitant to access medical services for fear of contracting COVID-19.

Households were asked whether they had received support to meet basic needs. **The vast majority (85 percent) reported that they had not received any assistance.** Of the 14 percent that did report assistance (480 households), the most common types included food (61 percent), cash (46 percent), hygiene kits related to COVID-19 (20 percent) and other hygiene kits (23 percent) (see Figure 6).

Figure 6: Proportion of households reporting types of support received, by urban/rural location^{70, 71}



The most commonly reported sources of assistance were relatives and friends (44 percent), followed by community or neighbours (39 percent), the Government (30 percent), and United Nations/ NGO organizations (30 percent).⁷² Government key informants specifically highlighted that the

Government gave unemployment grants, and disability and social protection money to meet essential needs. They also highlighted that these were temporary solutions, and recommended additional actions such as providing financial incentives for more work, and in-country

manufacturing of personal protective equipment (PPE).

The lack of PPE likely also impacted people's ability to earn money from employment. Key informant interviews with representatives from workers' organizations reported that the greatest needs at the time of the interview were public health related, including masks, sanitizers and information on how to prevent the disease. In addition, there were likely compounding impacts on those with intersecting vulnerabilities, including elderly household members, persons with chronic illnesses or others more vulnerable to COVID-19.

5.1.10 Impacts on relocation choices

The vast majority of households reported that **there was no change in their intentions to stay or relocate within or outside of Iraq as a result of the pandemic.** Of the six households that did report changes, the reasons were that they expected to have more or better livelihood opportunities in a new location (6 households), that they wanted to be close to friends or relatives who could support their livelihoods (4 households), that there were decreased livelihood possibilities in the areas they originally intended to relocate to (3 households) and that there were fewer livelihood opportunities in their current location (3 households).⁷³

5.1.11 Impacts on stress levels and tensions in the household

One less tangible potential impact of COVID-19 is on levels of stress and tension in households and communities. Overall, **82 percent of households reported no change in the stress levels of household members and/or the amount of interpersonal conflict within the household since the start of the pandemic.** This was slightly higher for female-headed households (87 percent), compared to male-headed households (81 percent).⁷⁴ Of the 17 percent of households that did report an increase in stress levels, 15 percent said that it had increased, and 2 percent that it had increased a lot.

The 538 households that reported an increase in levels of stress and conflict primarily reported **links to financial struggles due to a lack of income (69 percent); fear of contracting COVID-19 (47 percent); domestic problems such as fights with a spouse, child or parent (40 percent); and financial insecurity due to an increase in debt (39 percent).**⁷⁵ While the majority of households in both the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (70 percent) and Federal Iraq (86 percent) reported no change in levels of stress or interpersonal conflict, the proportion of households reporting an increase was slightly higher in the former (22 percent) compared to the latter (13 percent).

A high proportion of households (93 percent) reported that the pandemic did not lead to a change in the level of community tensions, such as more crime or stealing, fighting, harassment, unrest in the community or neighbourhood, or tension within or between communities. A higher proportion of male-headed households reported no change in the level of tensions (94 percent) compared to female-headed households (87 percent).⁷⁶ This finding is surprising, considering the declining security situation in Iraq in 2020.⁷⁷ It could be influenced by a number of factors, including the fluctuating security situation since before the onset of the pandemic, with households possibly not perceiving COVID-19 or associated restrictions as further exacerbating the situation. Another factor may be the lack of data collection in more insecure areas, which may have excluded the perspectives of households facing the greatest deterioration in the security situation. Secondary data suggest that there could be an overall decrease in sectarian tensions.⁷⁸ Qualitative responses and secondary data suggested that communities responded to increased needs resulting from COVID-19 through greater consideration for others and a more pronounced solidarity around confronting a common obstacle in their community.⁷⁹

Five percent of households reported that they did not know whether there had been an increase in tensions, and **just 2 percent reported experiencing an increase in tensions as a consequence of the pandemic.** Of those 2 percent (49 households), 21

households reported that tensions increased due to crime (stealing/looting), 7 reported an increase in tensions with neighbours, and 6 reported increased tensions among different age groups. **The reported reasons for these increases were reduced income (32 households), anxiety around becoming sick with COVID-19 (22 households) and blaming others for the spread of COVID-19 (7 households).**⁸⁰

The vast majority of households in both Federal Iraq (95 percent) and the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (85 percent) reported no change in levels of tension in their community as a result of the pandemic. In the former, 9 percent of households reported that they did not know if there had been a change, compared to 4 percent in the latter. Less than 1 percent of households in Federal Iraq reported experiencing any change, while 3 percent of households in Kurdistan Region of Iraq reported more tensions related to COVID-19, and 2 percent reported more tensions but unrelated to COVID-19.

In contrast to the households surveyed, **most individual interview respondents (78) described experiencing some level of stress, most often due to concerns about decreased income or about themselves or their family contracting the virus.** Individual interviewees largely stated that their family tension did not increase as a result of these exacerbated stressors (rather, many families

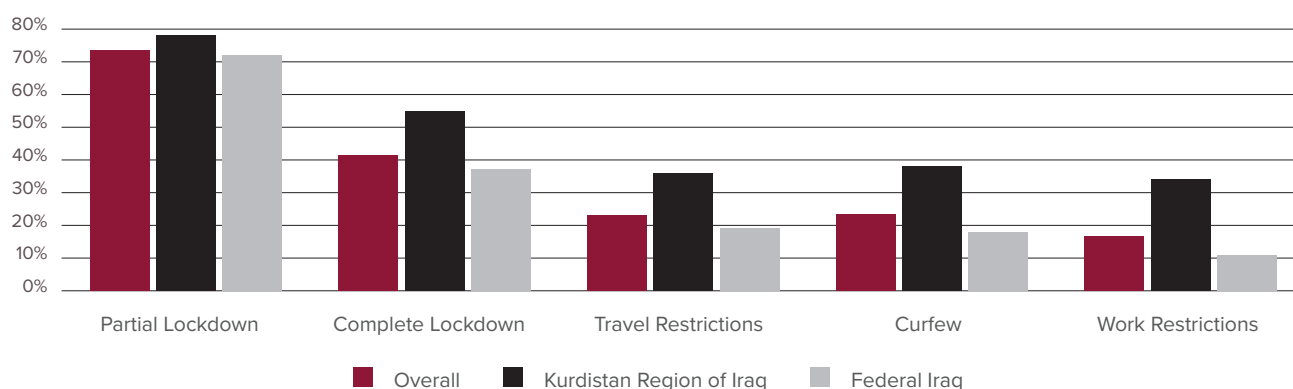
found their household relationships strengthened). The overwhelming majority of individual interview respondents (87) also confirmed that community tension had not increased between their population group and others, but rather that the community had come together and supported one another.

Area-based interview respondents confirmed a similar pattern, with the majority stating that there had been no increase in tensions (such as physical and verbal violence, crime, less integration/acceptance, and more discrimination towards specific groups) between or within their communities since the pandemic started. **Two respondents reported relationships becoming stronger across different groups, and people being more helpful.** Other respondents did mention a general increase in anxiety and tension, however, connected to the fear of contracting COVID-19.

5.2 Impacts of movement restrictions on livelihoods and basic needs

This section considers how movement restrictions impacted the ability of people and households to engage in livelihood activities, meet basic needs, and access goods and services at the national and governorate levels.

Figure 7: Proportion of households reporting types of movement restrictions as a response to the COVID-19 pandemic in their area, by location



5.2.1 Types of movement restrictions

Movement restrictions varied in both type and timing between the Kurdistan Region of Iraq and Federal Iraq (Figure 7), as well as across governorates. Restrictions included, among others, curfews, legal regulations, closure of airports and points of entry, and limitations on mobility across governorates as well as on commercial and trade activity, especially between Federal Iraq and the Kurdistan Region of Iraq.⁸¹

When households were asked what types of movement restrictions they faced in their areas, **the most commonly reported type was a partial lockdown, where respondents were only allowed to leave their residence for basic needs (74 percent of households)**. This was followed by complete lockdown, reported by 41 percent of households, and travelling restrictions that limited the ability of households to move across borders and to certain areas (23 percent of households).⁸² Key informants from the Government reported that they experienced fewer issues with restrictions.

There were no significant differences reported on movement restrictions between rural and urban locations. Restrictions were primarily applied at the governorate level, rather than the district or subdistrict level.

5.2.2 Impacts of movement restrictions

As highlighted earlier, a share of both households and individual interview respondents found that their income decreased as a result of COVID-19. Of the 60 individual interview respondents reporting this, the majority indicated that it was linked to public health restrictions, including curfews and restrictions on movement. Given reduced income, a considerable proportion of individual interviewees reported that they were unable to meet their basic needs each month.

Among challenges related to movement restrictions and livelihoods, the one most commonly reported by key informants was that employees could not

access their usual workplaces, which reduced working hours and/or productivity. This was reported in area-based interviews as well, while **67 percent of households said that COVID-19 restrictions prevented them from accessing their work**. The share was higher for households in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (82 percent) compared to households in Federal Iraq (61 percent), which is likely linked to data on compliance with movement restrictions showing that households in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq followed these restrictions to a higher degree. The share was largely consistent for female-headed households (72 percent) compared to male-headed households (66 percent).

Key informants from workers' organizations noted that curfews and restrictions as well as concerns about staff contracting COVID-19 meant that daily labourers lost income when projects, such as in construction, were delayed or cancelled. Curfews reduced the time that people had to search for jobs, which specifically impacted daily labourers.

Another effect of movement restrictions was on access to banks. **Some key informant interviewees from workers' organizations stated that the curfew did not allow them to access their bank to receive their salary**; this was echoed by key informants from other types of organizations. Banks in some instances closed altogether or only opened for a limited number of days, which slowed payment processes.⁸³ There were some reports of banks imposing withdrawal limits on customers to varying degrees, which could be another factor limiting household access to income.⁸⁴

Twenty-three percent of households reported that restrictions prevented household members from going to the grocery store to buy necessities such as food, water and hygiene products. A slightly higher proportion reported this in rural areas (29 percent) compared to urban areas (20 percent), but with no significant difference between male- and female-headed households. This issue was widely reported across area-based interviews, where most respondents highlighted that curfews, movement restrictions, bans on gatherings and the

closing of shops made it difficult for people to get goods and services, or that they had to pay higher prices than normal.

5.2.3 Compliance with movement restrictions

Half of all households (1,496 households) reported that they were able to fully comply with movement restrictions. An additional 34 percent reported that they could comply most of the time, and 9 percent that usual movement patterns were not affected by the restrictions.⁸⁵ **The proportion of households reporting compliance was higher in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (74 percent) than in Federal Iraq (40 percent).** A higher proportion of female-headed households reported fully complying (65

percent) compared to male-headed households (46 percent).⁸⁶

Some key informants from employment services organizations stated that restrictions made it challenging or impossible for them to attend work in their usual setting, but that they continued to abide by such measures. This was similarly reported by several key informants and individual interview respondents. **Data from the household surveys, however, found that needing to work was one of the main reasons that households reported not following restrictions (47 percent of households).** See Table 13. In this, there was no significant difference between Federal Iraq and the Kurdistan Region of Iraq.

Table 13: Top four reasons households reported not always following movement restrictions, by governorate⁸⁷

	Had to get access to food, percentage	Had to for work, to earn money, percentage	Had to for medical reasons, percentage	Did not think the measures were useful, percentage
Al-Anbar	33	32	8	20
Al-Basrah	96	64	87	2
Al-Muthanna	72	65	25	30
Al-Najaf	51	78	13	49
Al-Qadissiya	41	26	23	28
Al-Sulaymaniyah	26	37	n/a	74
Babil	54	52	23	29
Baghdad	52	32	24	26
Diyala	47	54	44	14
Duhok	58	67	8	17
Erbil	69	47	37	33
Kerbala	58	73	16	21
Kirkuk	62	65	55	n/a
Maysan	33	45	23	30

	Had to get access to food, percentage	Had to for work, to earn money, percentage	Had to for medical reasons, percentage	Did not think the measures were useful, percentage
Ninewa	22	30	17	52
Salah-al-Din	35	42	30	32
Thi-Qar	53	53	36	26
Wassit	46	52	34	10
Overall	59	47	37	24

5.3 Impacts on vulnerable households

This section considers how COVID-19 may have differently impacted vulnerable households and population groups, such as women and female-headed households, children and youth, persons with disabilities, and displaced communities. Findings are based on subsets of households surveyed, and therefore should be considered indicative.

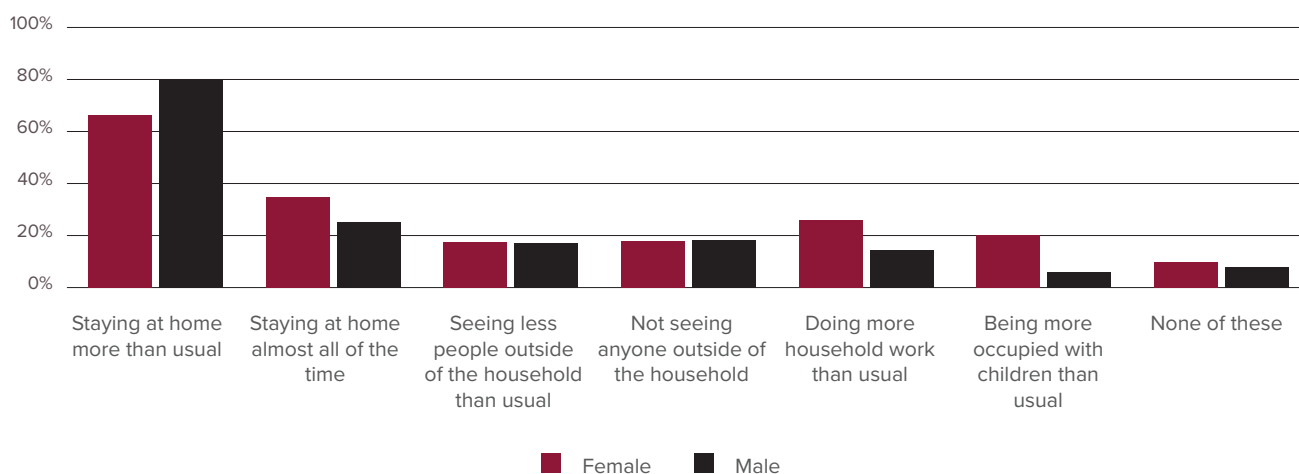
5.3.1 Women and female-headed households

Women were more likely to have faced socioeconomic impacts than men. As noted in the earlier discussion on unpaid care work, the share of females who reported taking on additional unpaid household tasks since the start of the pandemic (9 percent) was higher than the share of males (6 percent). Further, a **higher proportion of survey respondents from female-headed households reported that the number of household members earning income from permanent employment had changed (25 percent) compared to male-headed households⁸⁸ (11 percent).⁸⁹** Similar findings emerged on the decrease in the number of household members earning employment from casual labour or irregular work (33 percent for female-headed households versus 24 percent for male-headed households).⁹⁰ In terms of food security and coping mechanisms, no significant differences between female- and male-headed households were observed.

Movement restrictions impacted men and women differently (Figure 8). Fifty-eight percent of households reported that it was harder for women to travel (for work and other purposes) at the time of the interview compared to before the pandemic.⁹¹ This share was higher for households in Federal Iraq (68 percent) and in urban locations (64 percent) compared to households in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (28 percent) and in rural locations (45 percent).⁹² Additionally, **16 percent of households reported that, since the pandemic, the number of geographical areas deemed insecure for women and girls had increased**, for reasons other than a fear of contracting COVID-19. The share was slightly higher for households in urban areas (17 percent) than rural areas (12 percent).⁹³ This contradicts findings on stress and tensions in households that indicated no heightened community tensions as a result of the pandemic. It could indicate increased levels of insecurity due to economic or other factors.

A higher proportion of women (35 percent) than men (25 percent) reported staying at home almost all of the time as a consequence of movement restrictions. Women also reported doing more household work than usual at a higher rate (26 percent) than men (15 percent), and minding children more than usual (20 percent for women and 6 percent for men).⁹⁴ In only one area did a higher proportion of men than women report increased impacts from movement restrictions, in terms of staying at home more than usual. This

Figure 8: Proportion of households reporting consequences of movement restrictions on household members, by gender



could be because the average amount of time female household members normally stay at home was higher to begin with, as the indicator was reported as relative.

The impact of the pandemic was not consistently higher on women or female-headed households in all categories. The **reported change in monthly household employment income was consistent across female- and male-headed households** (16 percent). Similarly, there was almost no reported change in the proportion of female individuals earning an income from work before or after the start of the pandemic (4 percent at both points). One area-based interview respondent in Muthanna, however, indicated that women and widows have been more severely affected by COVID-19 because they had severely reduced chances to access income. This could suggest that the number of women reporting an income from work before and after the pandemic remained low due to a further decrease in job prospects for women. This was also suggested by one key informant from a workers’ organization, who contended that vulnerable groups, particularly women and persons with disabilities, were even less likely to be hired when jobs are scarce.

5.3.2 Children and youth

“Education stopped completely because of a fear of contracting the virus by students and teachers. All schools, educational centres and colleges closed. Teaching online didn’t succeed because of a lack of technical tools or methods of teaching that many students didn’t understand and were not able to learn from.”

— Key informant from urban government, Kurdistan Region of Iraq

Many governorates imposed restrictions curtailing the ability of children to attend school. As a result, **approximately 23 percent of households with school-aged children reported that at least one child was not attending school regularly** (at least four days per week) at the time of the interview.⁹⁵ The rate was higher for households in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (48 percent) compared to households in Federal Iraq (14 percent). It was approximately the same for male and female children.

When asked whether the prevalence of school-aged children not attending school regularly was related to the COVID-19 pandemic, 53 percent

of households reported that it was not due to the pandemic and 45 percent of households reported that it was. The **reasons given by households reporting that reduced attendance was due to the pandemic were that the school was still temporarily closed (71 percent); that homeschooling was too difficult, and they did not have the required equipment (16 percent); and that they could not get to school and there was no homeschooling organized by the school (13 percent).**^{96, 97}

“The most affected group during the pandemic was the youth, due to the lack of job opportunities for them, the difficulty of going out, and transportation challenges because of curfew. So many lost their jobs and the situation became more difficult for them financially and morally.”

— Key informant from urban government,
Federal Iraq

In addition to the proportion of households that reported at least one school-aged child not attending school regularly, 9 percent of households with school-aged children reported having at least one child who was not enrolled in formal education for the 2020-2021 school year. This proportion was consistent for households with male children (5 percent) and female children (6 percent).

Households were also asked to report on whether the participation of young members (10-24 years old) in youth activities had changed as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, such as studying at university, learning opportunities outside of university, and skills development in youth centres or youth friendly spaces. The highest proportion of households reported no change (71 percent) in these activities. This was followed by households reporting that at least one youth member stopped attending (6 percent) or decreased their engagement in (2 percent) university studies, or that at least one youth member stopped attending (5 percent) or decreased their engagement in

(3 percent) life skills or job skills development in youth centres or youth friendly spaces.

The impact of COVID-19 restrictions on youth employment was mentioned across multiple qualitative interviews. One area-based interview respondent in Muthanna indicated that youth were more likely to be impacted by the pandemic because they were more likely to work in casual labour positions. A government key informant echoed this sentiment, highlighting that there were fewer job opportunities for young people, and curfews had most likely caused them to lose their jobs.

5.3.3 Persons with disabilities

“Among the vulnerable people most affected by COVID-19 measures and movement restrictions are those with chronic diseases due to their inability to go to the hospital. Almost all hospitals in Mosul are full with patients with coronavirus, so they afraid to visit hospitals for treatment.”

— Area-based interview respondent, Ninewa

Approximately 23 percent of households that responded to the survey reported having at least one member with a disability.⁹⁸ **On average, these households reported that it was harder to access health care since the start of the pandemic (37 percent) at only marginally higher rates than households without any members with disabilities (28 percent).**⁹⁹ This was consistent for both male- and female-headed households. Households with a disabled member also did not report, on average, any difference in their need for health care or money for medicines compared to before the pandemic.

Impacts on disabled and chronically ill populations were primarily reported by qualitative interview respondents. For example, when asked whether specific populations are more in need of services, key informants from employment services organizations reported that the chronically ill were most in need of medical treatment as they were unlikely to have pursued routine medical care

during COVID-19 for fear of transmission. Area-based interview respondents also expressed this concern, highlighting that hospitals were full of patients and therefore harder to access for anyone with a chronic illness.

5.3.4 Displaced communities

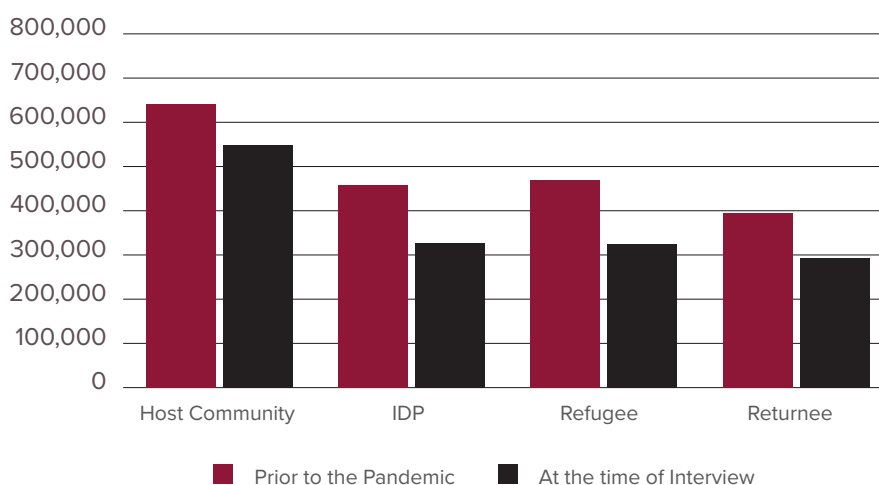
Household-level data from displaced populations was considered to determine whether groups of refugees, IDPs and returnees reported greater impacts across certain indicators compared to host community respondents. One issue was income, where displaced populations indicated larger impacts than host community counterparts. **More returnee (38 percent), IDP (36 percent) and refugee (33 percent) households reported a decrease in the number of members with income from casual or informal work compared to host communities with household members working in the same sectors (23 percent).**¹⁰⁰ This point was emphasized by one male individual interview respondent from Federal Iraq:

“...after the spread of COVID-19, the job opportunities reduced and many people from the host community lost their jobs.... and the owners of the jobs don't prefer to select or take refugees for jobs and if they take them, they pay low wages for them.”

— Urban male casual worker, Federal Iraq

Among households reporting changes in their monthly employment income perceived as directly related to COVID-19, returnee households (97 percent) were dominant compared to host community households (77 percent).¹⁰¹ All population groups reported negative changes in average monthly employment income from the start of the pandemic to the time of the interview. This change was slightly higher for members of currently displaced population groups (IDPs and refugees), compared to host community members and returnees (see Figure 9).

Figure 9: Reported changes in monthly average household income, by population group¹⁰²



One area-based interview respondent from al-Basrah emphasized that COVID-19 restrictions had impacted the ability of refugees to obtain new documents, such as forms from the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) or residency cards. Barriers included government offices being closed and the high cost of mandatory COVID-19 testing. This finding is echoed in other UNDP policy briefs that have highlighted pandemic impacts on the day-to-day functions of legal and judiciary services.¹⁰³ Key informants from rural areas of Federal Iraq stated that IDPs were the most negatively impacted due to NGOs leaving the country during the pandemic.

5.4 Impacts on economic sectors and businesses/enterprises

This section considers the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and associated lockdowns, containment and public health measures on various economic sectors and businesses.

5.4.1 Impacts on sectors and businesses

Key informant and area-based interviews consistently reported that all sectors, especially the private sector, have been affected by COVID-19 and associated restrictions. Respondents also highlighted that the degree of impact varied by sector. **Key informants specified that tourism, clothing and hotels (luxury sectors) were struggling, along with non-luxury industries that relied on daily or casual labourers.** For the latter, they hypothesized that this was because daily labourers had a harder time finding work due to movement restrictions. One key informant highlighted the impact on travel and tourism:

“Tourism and travel stopped because of the movement restrictions and quarantine and because the borders and airports were closed for several months for anyone who wanted to come to Iraq.”

— Key informant from urban government,
Kurdistan Region of Iraq

The impact specifically on service industries was highlighted by other sources, which indicated that the retail, hospitality, accommodation and other consumer-focused services have been severely damaged by lockdown measures.¹⁰⁴ **Several area-based interview respondents mentioned that public stores, coffee shops, restaurants and malls were among the sectors most affected** as they had to close to follow measures from the Ministry of Health.

“There were difficulties for farmers to get seeds and plants because most of the shops and governmental offices that support the farmers were closed for a long time. In addition to that, the farmers find it difficult to sell their products or send it to other areas of Iraq because of the movement barriers.”

— Key informant from urban government,
Kurdistan Region of Iraq

Government key informants in rural areas were more likely to report that the agriculture sector and factories were among the most negatively impacted sectors. Key informants from large businesses attributed negative effects on agriculture to limitations on both transportation and the ability to employ unskilled daily labourers. One key informant from a research institution, however, reported that agriculture has been positively impacted because people could sell their goods for more money than usual. The same key informant pointed to agriculture as one of the most important sectors for the future given many job opportunities for people with different skill levels. One area-based informant from Erbil reported a similar notion, but expanded on it to say that there was not much support from the Government to fix the problems of unemployed workers.

Other sectors that key informants highlighted as struggling were imports, sectors that relied on NGO funding and education. Many key informants reported that businesses chose to postpone work until the pandemic was less severe. According to one employment services key informant in

Federal Iraq, the simultaneous depreciation of the dinar coupled with the pandemic, public health restrictions and economic recession have had a negative effect on all sectors.

5.4.2 Responses by businesses

Strategies used to overcome the economic downturn have varied from business to business, according to key informants from large businesses. Those who could work remotely reported that they did, while those in agriculture stated that they would stop importing agricultural inputs and related products, and instead increase local production of these items.

One individual interview respondent reported that many foreign companies had left, and would likely not return due to the increased costs of operating, including for obtaining visas and other

documentation, and for testing employees as they entered and exited the country.

Key informants identified some sectors as benefiting from COVID-19. They saw the **health-care and technology and industries as gaining from increased demand for health-care products (especially PPE) and technology to enable remote work and schooling.**

Household survey respondents reported an increase in people working for their own businesses or a household business (52 percent) compared to before the pandemic (32 percent), which could indicate either an increase in the establishment of small-scale businesses or more household members shifting to working for already established businesses of other household members.

6. CONCLUSION

The data collected for this assessment and existing secondary literature make clear that the socioeconomic impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on Iraq have been sizable, with variances among social groups and regions. The impacts on livelihoods in particular were apparent. Households surveyed at the national level attributed changes in income and employment predominantly to the pandemic. Overall, **employment income was reported across all population groups as decreasing by an average of 16 percent, with a greater impact on households with members employed in casual labour or irregular work, compared to those in permanent positions.**

Qualitative interviews indicated that vulnerable populations such as youth, and displaced or formerly displaced households were more likely to be employed in casual work in general, and would thus have been more affected. Data also suggested that employment was increasing in specific sectors more likely to include casual or daily working arrangements, such as construction,

while decreasing in other sectors seen as more stable, such as government employment. These combined data points suggest **a continued negative impact on livelihoods and employment as an increasing number of people, particularly vulnerable people, face reliance on casual work.**

Other impacts are evident in the use of negative household coping mechanisms to obtain additional income. Since the start of COVID-19, **70 percent of households reported that they began using or increased existing use of methods to obtain additional income,** including spending savings, taking on loans or debts, and borrowing money. Households also reported an average reduction of 17 percent in monthly non-employment income, indicating an overall negative impact on household economies.

It is also telling to consider areas where **reported impacts are smaller, such as housing and shelter, WASH and relocation choices.** Additionally,

despite reporting reduced income, **the majority of households reported no change in their amount of household debt.** In terms of food security, the majority of households said that they did not start any new or increase the use of any coping strategies to get enough food. Finally, 82 percent of households reported no change in stress levels and/or interpersonal conflicts between household members, and 93 percent reported no change in community tensions. Potential reasons for these limited impacts are highlighted throughout the report, and could emphasize the need for further research to understand how such impacts have been mitigated.

Differences were observed in impacts on households in different geographic designations. The costs of movement restrictions varied, **with a greater proportion of households in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq experiencing complete lockdowns and movement restrictions preventing them from accessing their work, compared to those in Federal Iraq.** Perhaps related, **the reported reduction in average monthly employment income was more than double for households in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq compared to those in Federal Iraq.** Households in Federal Iraq were more likely to identify the pandemic as the direct or indirect cause of household income declines, however, compared to those in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq. Looking at indicators such as employment income, the reduction in the proportion of household members working in casual labour and use of food coping strategies suggests that some of the greatest impacts have been felt in northern governorates such as al-Sulaymaniyah, Erbil and Ninewa. These geographic differences, coupled with additional indicative differences observed

for households in rural and urban locations, **underscore the need to contextualize policies and interventions to specific areas of the country and to ensure that these are based on solid data and information.** This will ensure greater and more sustainable benefits for populations.

Further data showed that population groups were experiencing pandemic impacts differently. Vulnerable populations, including women, youth and displaced populations, have been disproportionately impacted. **For women and female-headed households, the impact was greater in terms of income, types of employment, movement restrictions and unpaid household work. Youth reported decreased school attendance rates and appeared more at risk of loss of employment income, while displaced populations reported decreases in the number of members reporting income from casual labour or informal work, compared to host community members.**

The impacts reported specifically for households with disabled members and displaced communities tended to appear more frequently in qualitative than quantitative data. Since the quantitative data for this assessment came from self-reported responses to the household survey, and qualitative data were based on perceptions of key individuals, **it is possible that external sources perceived more pronounced COVID-19 impacts on vulnerable households than what was felt by households themselves.** Further research would be necessary to understand whether findings from the qualitative interviews were systematically experienced by these populations.

ANNEX 1: GEOGRAPHIC CLASSIFICATIONS

Governorate

The highest administrative boundary below the national level. Iraq comprises 18 governorates: Al-Anbar, Al-Basrah, Al-Muthanna, Al-Najaf, Al-Qadissiya, Al-Sulaymaniyah, Babil, Baghdad, Diyala, Duhok, Erbil, Kerbala, Kirkuk, Maysan, Ninewa, Salah Al-Din, Thi Qar and Wassit.

District

Governorates are divided into districts, with a total of 101 districts across Iraq.

Host community

Communities in their area of origin hosting displaced persons (including IDPs and refugees).

Vulnerable groups

Vulnerable groups include women, single-headed households, youth, children, people with disabilities and displaced communities.

The Kurdistan Region of Iraq

The Kurdistan Region of Iraq includes three governorates, all covered in this assessment: Duhok, Erbil and Al-Sulaymaniyah.

Federal Iraq

The collective governorates of Iraq, excluding the three governorates in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq.

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ENDNOTES

- 1 UNDP 2020b.
- 2 ILO, UNDP and Fafo 2020.
- 3 Ibid.
- 4 UNOCHA 2020.
- 5 For this assessment, youth are defined as persons aged 10-24 years.
- 6 Irregular work is frequently associated with part-time employment, fixed-term work, temporary work, on-call work, home-based workers and agency work.
- 7 Casual work is defined as the engagement of workers on an occasional and intermittent basis, for a specific number of hours, days or weeks, in return for a wage dictated by a daily or periodic work agreement.
- 8 For this assessment, "permanent work" is defined as the engagement of workers, regardless of sector, on a steady or regular basis, and in a manner that does not fit the definition of casual work above. This covers both public and private sectors
- 9 Urban households are located in subdistricts containing a 'major city', according to the database for Iraq of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs. All other households are considered to be in rural locations for disaggregation purposes.
- 10 WorldPop, [Population Counts](#), accessed 5 April 2021.
- 11 In governorates where households were sampled beyond the capital centres, only safely accessible districts and subdistricts were considered. These could be reached under reasonable operational constraints and in a timely manner.
- 12 Figures in Table 1 are presented at the individual level, rather than the household level, as many of the demographic indicators are specific to individuals.
- 13 WorldPop, [Population Counts](#), accessed 5 April 2021.
- 14 [IMPACT Initiatives Data Cleaning Minimum Standards Checklist](#), accessed 10 March 2021.
- 15 See the IOM [Displacement Tracking Matrix \(DTM\) Iraq](#), accessed 17 September 2020.
- 16 IOM, UNDP and UN-Habitat 2020.
- 17 Rubin 2020.
- 18 ILO 2021.
- 19 Government of Iraq, Kurdistan Regional Government, European Union and UNESCO 2019, pp. 35 and 48.
- 20 ILO, UNDP and Fafo 2020.
- 21 IOM 2020.
- 22 UNICEF and World Bank 2020.
- 23 Protection Cluster 2020.
- 24 World Health Organization (WHO), [Coronavirus disease \(COVID-19\) Dynamic Infographic Dashboard for Iraq](#) 2020. Available from, accessed 17 September 2020.
- 25 UNICEF and World Bank 2020.
- 26 Schools at different grade levels were closed for long periods in 2020, and from February to April in 2021. Sources: [Kurdistan Regional Government \(KRG\) issues new Coronavirus Directives for Schools Following Surge in Infections](#), [KRG Takes Action to Prevent Coronavirus Outbreak in Kurdistan](#), and [Kurdistan bans movement with the rest of Iraq three days a week, halts government work on Thursdays](#), accessed 31 March 2021.
- 27 UNESCO 2020.
- 28 UNICEF, [Assessment of COVID-19 on Poverty and Vulnerability in Iraq](#), accessed 03 March 2021.
- 29 UNOCHA 2020.
- 30 UNDP 2020b.
- 31 FAO 2020.
- 32 The exchange rate used was \$1 equals 1,440 IQD. Sourced from the [United Nations Operational Rates of Exchange](#), accessed on 29 March 2021.
- 33 Within the household surveys, a loop was conducted to ask this question about each individual member. The percentages reported here therefore represent proportions of all individuals within households. Since the sample was drawn at the household level, however, this information is indicative only.
- 34 The number of female respondents reporting a change in employment since the start of the pandemic (44) was markedly smaller than the number of male respondents (873).
- 35 A chi square test has confirmed a discernible difference between these stratifications. Findings are not likely the result of a random distribution of responses.
- 36 This question was only asked in households that had experienced decreased income and identified the reason as connected to COVID-19 (1,593 households).
- 37 Multiple answers could be selected, so findings may add up to more than 100 percent.
- 38 Additional answers to this question included "other", "don't know", or "refuse to answer."
- 39 Based on the confidence interval of this assessment, the differences reported in these figures are likely statistically significant despite the comparison of groups that were not formally stratified as part of the sampling methodology.
- 40 Within the household surveys a loop with individual members was conducted. Because the sample was drawn at the household level, however, this information is indicative only.
- 41 The subset consists of 167 households.
- 42 Multiple answers could be selected, so findings may add up to more than 100 percent.
- 43 WFP, World Bank, IFAD and FAO 2020.
- 44 WFP, World Bank, IFAD and FAO 2021.
- 45 Within the household surveys, a loop was conducted to ask this question about each individual member. The percentages reported here therefore represent proportions of all individuals within households. Because the sample was drawn at the household level, however, this information is indicative only.
- 46 Additional types reported by less than 1 percent households included no change, working more days, working longer days, fewer paid leave days, more paid leave days, other, do not know, or refused to answer.

47 A chi square test has confirmed a discernible difference between these stratifications. Findings are not likely to be the result of a random distribution of responses.
48 Multiple answers could be selected, so findings may add up to more than 100 percent.
49 A chi square test has confirmed a discernible difference between these stratifications. Findings are not likely to be the result of a random distribution of responses.
50 Based on the confidence interval of this assessment, the differences reported in these figures are likely to be statistically significant despite comparing groups that were not formally stratified as part of the sampling methodology.
51 Multiple answers could be selected, so findings may add up to more than 100 percent.
52 Within the household surveys, a loop was conducted to ask this question about each individual member. The percentages reported here therefore represent proportions of all individuals within households. Since the sample was drawn at the household level, however, this information is indicative only.
53 Multiple answers could be selected, so findings may add up to more than 100 percent.
54 Non-employment income could come from rent, retirement funds or pensions, social services, remittances, and/or cash support from organizations or charities.
55 Based on the confidence interval of this assessment, the differences reported in these figures are likely to be statistically significant despite comparing groups that were not formally stratified as part of the sampling methodology.
56 A chi square test has confirmed a discernible difference between these stratifications. Findings are not likely to be the result of a random distribution of responses.
57 Other response options, including "do not know" and "refused to answer," were included, but reported by less than 1 percent of households.
58 Based on the confidence interval of this assessment, the differences reported in these figures are likely to be statistically significant despite comparing groups that were not formally stratified as part of the sampling methodology.
59 Multiple answers could be selected, so findings may add up to more than 100 percent.
60 A chi square test has found no discernible difference between these stratifications. Findings could be the result of a random distribution of responses.
61 Based on the confidence interval of this assessment, the differences reported in these figures are likely to be statistically significant despite comparing groups that were not formally stratified as part of the sampling methodology.
62 WFP, World Bank, IFAD and FAO 2020.
63 UNDP 2020b.
64 This is reported as a sum of households reporting that their water usage increased (21 percent) and the proportion of households reporting that their water usage increased a little (3 percent).
65 Multiple answers could be selected, so findings may add up to more than 100 percent. A chi square test has found no discernible difference between these stratifications. Findings could be the result of a random distribution of responses.
66 This is the sum of households reporting to notice more waste in the streets (20 percent) as well as households reporting a little more waste in the streets (6 percent).
67 Multiple answers could be selected, so findings may add up to more than 100 percent.
68 A chi square test has found no discernible difference between these stratifications. Findings could be the result of a random distribution of responses.
69 Ibid.
70 Multiple answers could be selected, so findings may add up to more than 100 percent.
71 A chi square test has found no discernible difference between these stratifications. Findings could be the result of a random distribution of responses.
72 Multiple answers could be selected, so findings may add up to more than 100 percent.
73 Multiple answers could be selected, so findings may add up to more than 100 percent.
74 Based on the confidence interval of this assessment, the differences reported in these figures are likely to be statistically significant despite comparing groups that were not formally stratified as part of the sampling methodology.
75 Multiple answers could be selected, so findings may add up to more than 100 percent.
76 Based on the confidence interval of this assessment, the differences reported in these figures are likely to be statistically significant despite comparing groups that were not formally stratified as part of the sampling methodology.
77 UNOCHA 2021.
78 UNDP 2020c.
79 Ibid.
80 Multiple answers could be selected, so findings may add up to more than 100 percent.
81 IOM 2020.
82 Multiple answers could be selected, so findings may add up to more than 100 percent.
83 Cash Working Group Iraq 2020.
84 Ibid.
85 Three percent of households reported that they were sometimes able to comply with the restrictions, and another 3 percent reported that they were able to comply with the restrictions half of the time.
86 Based on the confidence interval of this assessment, the differences reported in these figures are likely to be statistically significant despite comparing groups that were not formally stratified as part of the sampling methodology.
87 As a subset of households reporting that they did not follow movement restrictions. Note that for some governorates, the number of reports was very low (less than 20 households) and therefore percentages should be referenced for comparative purposes only.
88 696 of the households were female headed.
89 A chi square test has confirmed a discernible difference between these stratifications. Findings are not likely to be the result of a random distribution of responses.
90 Ibid.
91 Including households reporting that it was very much harder (28 percent) and a little harder (30 percent) for women to travel compared to before the start of the pandemic.
92 A chi square test has confirmed a discernible difference between these stratifications. Findings are not likely to be the result of a random distribution of responses.
93 Ibid.
94 Ibid.
95 School-aged children are defined as between ages 6-17 years.

- 96 Of households reporting that they didn't have the required equipment to facilitate homeschooling (64 households), the top three responses were that they did not have any devices (53 percent), they did not have enough devices (53 percent), and they did not have access to the Internet (35 percent).
- 97 Multiple answers could be selected, so findings may add up to more than 100 percent.
- 98 Households categorized as disabled had at least one member reporting difficulty in or not being able to do one of the following activities: seeing, hearing, walking/climbing steps, remembering/concentrating, self-care or communicating.
- 99 A chi square test has confirmed a discernible difference between these stratifications. Findings are not likely to be the result of a random distribution of responses..
- 100 Ibid.
- 101 Ibid.
- 102 A t-test has been run to confirm that the difference in reported income changes is statistically different between host community members and members of displaced populations, but not statistically significant among the different displaced populations.
- 103 UNDP 2020b.
- 104 UNDP 2020a.



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